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This dissertation describes the existence of several identity and modernization narratives concerning the involvement of so-called Overseas Chinese in the organization of the Cambodian silk weaving industry. It illustrates that ethnic Chinese, who are long established in Cambodia, are involved in both the production and trade of the sampot hol, a silk woven dress the Cambodian population is extremely proud of. On a production and advertising level however ethnic Chinese involvement in the silk industry cannot be talked about because it jeopardizes the popular modernization narrative that the contemporary silk weavers and the silk clothes they manufacture are authentic Khmer. Although powerful stakeholders such as the Royal family, the government and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGO's) uphold a primordial model what Khmer culture is, the author illustrates who or what is Khmer, and who or what is not Khmer, is not a simple matter. Elaborating on Marxist, post-structuralist and post-modernist theories this dissertation tackles the complexity of identity and culture in trade networks and explains both its visibility and invisibility in the organization of the Cambodian silk weaving industry.

John ter Horst was a researcher at the Department of Culture, Organisation and Management, VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His main fields of interest are identity politics, discourse analyses and trade networks in Southeast Asia. Currently, he is a lecturer social science at the social work department, Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands, and co-editing a book 'Social Work in Europe' (HB Press Baarn, forthcoming December 2008).

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WEAVING INTO CAMBODIA



John ter Horst

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*Trade and Identity Politics in the (post)-Colonial
Cambodian Silk Weaving Industry*

John ter Horst